

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name President Gardens Apartments Historic District

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number generally along President Ave., 83rd St., and 82nd Terrace between Lydia and Troost avenues [n/a] not for publication

city or town Kansas City [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64131

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant

[] nationally [] statewide [x] locally.

(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO Date 3 Nov 58

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[] entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined eligible for the

National Register

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined not eligible for the

National Register.

[] removed from the

National Register

[] other, explain

See continuation sheet [].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

n/a

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Community Planning & Development

Architecture

Landscape Architecture

Periods of Significance

1945-1948

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Gentry & Voskamp/Patti-MacDonald

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☐ Other:

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 24 Acres

UTM References

A. Zone15 Easting363480 Northing4315380

B. Zone15 Easting363570 Northing4315375

C. Zone15 Easting363580 Northing4315460

D. Zone15 Easting363900 Northing4315450

[x] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title see continuation sheet

organization _____ date _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Garden Investors L.P.; Thomas McCally, President

street & number 11711 N. College, Suite 160 telephone 317-848-7021

city or town Carmel state Indiana zip code 46032

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Section 7 Page 1

President Gardens Apartments Historic District
Jackson County, MO

SUMMARY:

The President Gardens Apartments Historic District is comprised of thirty-six (36) Colonial Revival apartment buildings located on a 24 acre site which generally runs east and west along 83rd Street and 82nd Terrace and is bounded by Troost and Lydia Avenues. Within the boundaries of the property there are the aforementioned 36 contributing buildings constructed in 1945, along with two (2) non-contributing structures- a swimming pool and chain link fence-, and one (1) non-contributing building- a bathhouse-; all of which were constructed in 1960, after the end of the period of significance. There are also a few pieces of metal playground equipment scattered around the site, however, none are of a size or scale to be counted as resources. Because of its design and purpose, the system of streets within the district is also considered a contributing structure, and the grounds of the entire district are considered a contributing site because of the elements of landscape design that were incorporated in the planning and development of the district. Native trees, along with decorative shrubbery, are scattered among the rolling hills and terraces of the district. Native limestone retaining walls are used in those areas where the banks of the hills are held back for streets and walkways. The overall combination of the elements allows for a pastoral, yet well ordered, setting.

The main entrance to the district is located at President Avenue on Troost Avenue between 83rd Terrace and 82nd Street. The apartment buildings are located along Forest Avenue, 83rd Street, Virginia Avenue, 82nd Terrace, and Tracy Avenue. These streets were laid out in a curving pattern between Troost and Lydia that gives the feeling that one street leads into another, thereby offering a sense of continuity and oneness within the district, yet providing a boundary from the surrounding residential area. All of the contributing resources within the district compliment each other to form a cohesive residential district and give the complex its identity. On the northwest corner of the original development sits a church and a small shopping center, both constructed at the time of the President Gardens Apartments project (1945). The church and shopping center are not included within the district boundaries because they are owned separately from the apartment buildings, and the owners objected to listing.

The red brick, two-story, gable and hipped roof Colonial Revival apartment buildings are located close to the interior streets, with walkways leading to the multiple front entry doors. The design of the district provided for off street parking as well as additional parking lots located behind and between buildings. The district contains many mature trees as well as large shrubs which serve as foundation plants and accents throughout. The undulating and rolling landscape of the site, along with careful placement of the individual buildings and the curving plan of the streets, prevents views of the entire district from any one vista. The non-contributing pool, bathhouse, and surrounding chain link fence are located on the approximate center of the district. The buildings have received minimal exterior alterations, and when combined with the integrity of the street system, gives the President Gardens Apartments Historic District a high degree of integrity in location, setting, feeling, association, and design, reflective of a housing complex from the end of World War II and the post-War era.

ELABORATION

The President Gardens Apartment Historic District is an intact representation of a planned, residential, rental housing project constructed to house defense plant workers for the Kansas City Pratt & Whitney engine plant during World War II. The twenty-four acre undulating district contains thirty-six Colonial Revival style apartment buildings. A main entry off of Troost Avenue contains a median dividing a double drive. A small commercial strip on the northwest corner of the district formerly contained a grocery store, a church, and the main office of the complex, but is not included in this nomination due to owner objection. The interior street system is maintained by the City of Kansas City, and generally loops around the property in an irregular pattern that flows from one street to the next, with the apartment buildings located on both sides of the streets. The apartment buildings are generally situated parallel to the streets, but a few are also situated at various angles in relation to the streets. There are large grassy areas between many of the buildings, and an Olympic size swimming pool in the center of the district. The pool and bathhouse, surrounded by a chain link fence, were added in 1960, and are not related to the period of significance. Metal playground equipment is presently scattered in a few places on the district, and because of their small scale

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and size, are not counted as resources. Evergreen shrubs serve as foundation plants, and there are many large deciduous and evergreen trees throughout the district. There is some head-in parking on the streets, in addition to a few parking lots situated between some of the buildings. Native limestone retaining walls and steps leading up to the apartments are featured in hillier parts of the district.

All of the 36 apartment buildings are similarly designed using a standardized plan, or "building block," which calls for four (4) apartments-- two on each floor flanking a central hall-- in each building. Each four apartment building measures approximately 60' in length and 30' in width. This measurement varies slightly from building to building, as some are strung together in larger units and share common walls, while other buildings stand alone. The facade of each two-story building generally features eight windows and a door across five bays; two windows on each wing-- a single double hung window and a paired double hung window-- on each floor flanking the central doorway. However, some of the buildings feature a slight variation in this pattern of fenestration. Rather than a single and paired window on each wing, in some cases three singles are used. Above each doorway is a hall window, which provides light to the interior's second floor hallway. Some of the buildings are strung together in units, with two buildings sharing a common wall. The most common pattern found when two or more buildings are connected is a linear pattern where all of the facades are flush with each other, however, there are variations within the district, including both "L" and "U" shaped patterns, or when the building units are laid in a linear pattern, some of the facades are setback. Each building, or units of buildings, has a shallow hip or gable roof with projecting boxed eaves and simple wood frieze boards beneath. Tall square chimneys provide exhaust for the units' heating systems.

Due to the repetition of the basic building block, the apartment buildings have virtually identical exterior features in spite of their varying footprints. Generally, the red brick exteriors are laid in a Common Bond, with a Flemish Bond laid in every seventh course; this pattern holds true to the majority of the buildings, however, there are a few exceptions where the Flemish Bond may run every sixth or eighth course. Each facade has an exterior centered paneled door with sidelights and transoms. There are primarily three variations of accentuated door pediments and frames, each typical of the Colonial Revival Style. Some of the differences between the different entry door frames are very subtle, but across the front of a single building, the differences are noticeable. The pediments feature one of three plans -- a semi-elliptical pediment, a simple rectangular pediment mimicking an entablature, and a triangular pediment. The semi-elliptical pediments feature either dentils or applied scroll work, with some having additional molding, typical of the Colonial Revival style. The simple rectangular entablatures feature varying engaged columns centered in the architrave section, or else contain applied work of decorative rings or leaves. The triangular pediments have decorative molding or an applied fleur-de-lis ornament. The door frames are grooved pilasters, but can vary in width from door to door. These variations provide for individuality of each entrance, yet give continuity to the entire district; for example, one of the largest building units has six exterior doors, however, all are slightly different in one feature or another. Besides the accentuated front entryways, other typical Colonial Revival features include the original wood multi-paned double-hung windows and shallow-pitched hip or gable roofs with boxed eaves and simple friezes. Some of the apartment buildings include brick corbelled corners imitating quoins.

Within the 36 buildings in the district are 404 two-bedroom apartments and 41 one-bedroom apartments. All of the regular one- and two-bedroom apartments are identical to each other (respectively), with the exception that the room arrangement will be mirrored on opposite sides of the central entry hallways. As noted, the basic "building block" contains a central hall with two units on the first floor, and two on the second reached by the stairs in the central hallway. The living rooms of the individual apartments are entered from the central hall. A kitchen is to the rear of the living room, and a very small hall leads to either one or two bedrooms and the bath. The interiors are virtually intact, and retain their simple wood baseboard molding, wood paneled doors, and original wood kitchen cabinets. The only significant alteration occurred in the 1980s when individual HVAC units were installed in a new closet in the kitchen along with new unit entry doors. A certified rehabilitation has been occurring at the apartment complex, beginning in 1996 and should be completed in 2000.

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Although the main address for the President Gardens is listed as 8229 Troost, each building block of four apartment units has been assigned separate addresses by the city. Thus, some building units have one address, while others have up to six addresses (with each address representing four apartment units). Each building has also been assigned a building number by the original developers (1-36), and those numbers are still in use today. The footprint arrangement and number of the individual apartment buildings can be seen in the accompanying map (see continuation sheet Section 10, Page 29). The apartment buildings and their addresses are listed below according to building number:

Bldg. 1

8230 Forest Avenue
8323 Forest Avenue
1120 President Avenue

Bldg. 2

1121 President Avenue
8242 Forest Avenue
8244 Forest Avenue
8246 Forest Avenue

Bldg. 3

8250 Forest Avenue
8252 Forest Avenue
8254 Forest Avenue

Bldg. 4

1201 E. 83rd Street
1203 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 5

1205 E. 83rd Street
1207 E. 83rd Street
1209 E. 83rd Street
8304 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 6

8231 Forest Avenue

Bldg. 7

8235 Forest Avenue
8237 Forest Avenue
8239 Forest Avenue
8241 Forest Avenue
8243 Forest Avenue

Bldg. 8

8247 Forest Avenue
8249 Forest Avenue
8251 Forest Avenue
8253 Forest Avenue

Bldg. 9

8255 Forest Avenue
1200 E. 83rd Street
1202 E. 83rd Street
1204 E. 83rd Street
8250 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 10

8242 Tracy Avenue
8244 Tracy Avenue
8246 Tracy Avenue
8248 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 11

8230 Tracy Avenue
8232 Tracy Avenue
8234 Tracy Avenue
8236 Tracy Avenue
8238 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 12

1215 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1217 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1219 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1221 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg. 13

1214 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1216 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1218 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1220 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg. 14

8231 Tracy Avenue
8233 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 15

8237 Tracy Avenue
8239 Tracy Avenue
8241 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 16

8245 Tracy Avenue
8247 Tracy Avenue
8249 Tracy Avenue

Bldg. 17

1300 E. 83rd Street
1302 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 18

1301 E. 83rd Street
1303 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 19

1305 E. 83rd Street
1307 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 20

1304 E. 83rd Street
1306 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 21

1309 E. 83rd Street
1311 E. 83rd Street

Bldg. 22

8244 Virginia Avenue
8242 Virginia Avenue

Bldg. 23

8243 Virginia Avenue
8245 Virginia Avenue
8247 Virginia Avenue
8249 Virginia Avenue

Bldg. 24

8241 Virginia Avenue
8239 Virginia Avenue

Bldg. 25

8235 Virginia Avenue
8237 Virginia Avenue

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Bldg.26

8231 Virginia Avenue
8231 Virginia Avenue

Bldg.27

8230 Virginia Avenue
8232 Virginia Avenue
8234 Virginia Avenue

Bldg.28

1320 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg.29

1307 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1309 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1311 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg.30

1301 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1303 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1305 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg.31

1300 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1302 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1304 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1306 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg.32

1308 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1310 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1312 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1314 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1316 E. 82nd St. Ter.
1318 E. 82nd St. Ter.

Bldg.33

1226 E. 82nd St. Ter.
8216 Tracy Avenue
8218 Tracy Avenue

Bldg.34

8231 President Court
8233 President Court
8235 President Court

Bldg.35

8237 President Court
8239 President Court
8241 President Court
8243 President Court

Bldg.36

8247 President Court
8249 President Court
8251 President Court

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SUMMARY

President Gardens Apartments Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, and under Criterion C in the areas of ARCHITECTURE and LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE. President Gardens Apartments were constructed in 1945 to house defense workers employed at the Pratt & Whitney engine plant located just south of Kansas City, one of the last large defense plants to be built in the United States during World War II. Affordable housing for defense workers was a critical issue towards the end of the war. Without adequate housing, defense plants were at a disadvantage in retaining quality employees, causing a decrease in quantity and quality of production. President Gardens, like other defense workers' villages across the country, contributed to solving this problem. But, unlike other examples of defense workers' villages, President Gardens was privately financed with a mortgage insured by the Federal Housing Administration. The President Gardens Company, the developer of the complex, looked beyond the immediate defense needs and constructed an apartment complex that not only safeguarded their investment but provide for future community housing needs.

In the area of COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, President Gardens is significant as the largest single housing project to be developed in the Kansas City metropolitan area at the end of World War II. A combined effort of private funding and public assistance created a 36 building, 444 apartment complex, housing 1500 residents, to meet the housing needs of an influx of defense workers for the Pratt & Whitney engine plant at the end of World War II. This cooperative venture illustrates the collaboration of developers and the federal government to meet the critical needs of the community during a time of great national emergency.

In the area of ARCHITECTURE President Gardens is significant as a local example of the Colonial Revival style being applied to a large scale housing project. Designed by the architectural firm of Gentry and Voskamp, President Gardens' sparse Colonial Revival style and details satisfied the project's construction budget, yet provided a tasteful and dignified approach to multiple housing. Gentry and Voskamp used brick to interpret their design because lumber was considered a "critical" material to the war effort. The symmetrical and simple pattern for each apartment building (eight apartments to each building- four on each floor, flanking a central hall) fit well into the balanced fenestration and modest details of the Colonial Revival style.

In the area of LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, President Gardens reflects the careful site planning required by the Federal Housing Administration on projects which it oversaw. Curving roads which flowed from one area of the complex to another, planned open spaces, preservation of mature foliage, and the use of native limestone masonry in the construction of retaining walls were all judicious and carefully planned design features that led to a cohesive and integrated housing complex.

The period of significance begins in 1945 with the completion of construction and terminates at 1948, the arbitrary 50 year limit for eligibility.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT - Defense housing

In the early years of the 20th Century, the relationship between quality housing and labor productivity was largely ignored. This applied not only to industrial production but to the defense industry as well. At the beginning of the United States involvement in World War I, armament contracts were concentrated in a relatively small number of communities, most of which were already intensively engaged with work for the Allies. As production geared up housing shortages developed and seriously hampered the production of

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essential war materials¹ Eventually, the Federal government intervened in the areas of financing and building houses. Initially the federal government concentrated on constructing housing for federal employees - the civilian workers for the arsenals and navy yards. But, it soon expanded its role by assisting private defense plants by building dwellings for workers in those facilities and by extending loans to limited-dividend housing corporations.² The experience during World War I revealed how vital production was impaired, delayed, and in places, almost demoralized by the lack of shelter for the workers. Housing was caught in the middle of shortages of labor and materials, high prices, and priorities in shipments within a glutted transportation system. It did not catch up with the demands of the emergency until the emergency had passed.³

Housing for many specific segments of the United States' population remained an unresolved national failure during the years of peace preceding World War II. Even with the coming of the war and America's involvement as a armorer for the Allies, at the time that the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, housing in general was a critical problem while housing for military personnel and defense workers was in a state of crisis. Once the war started and during the ensuing years, housing conditions quickly degenerated as raw material consumption was allocated to the war effort rather than to the construction of new housing. This trend first manifested itself in the principal industrial areas of the country where the majority of defense contracts were placed. It then moved rapidly to the newly opened war manufacturing localities which had previously been sheltered from large scale industrialization; smaller cities on the western plains and the South.

The housing crisis provided a prime example of mismanagement before and during the early years of World War II. Although new federal agencies sprang into action to deal with the problem, because of decentralization of governmental authority between federal and state concerns, America was unable to go as far as other countries in taking control of essential housing services. The hopeless snarl of bureaucratic red tape made coordination of all the agencies almost impossible. For example, in 1940 the defense amendment to the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 moved Federal slum clearance funds into housing programs for defense areas. This amendment made it through Congress only by safeguarding local autonomy. The Lanham Act of 1940, on the other hand, imposed centralized control to communities with its Federal aid for defense housing and services.⁴ Thus some agencies gave local control to deal with the housing shortages, and some utilized centralized control. And these were only two of the sixteen different government bureaus which eventually formed or gained some sort of control over the national housing problem during World War II. At the end of February, 1942, President Roosevelt ordered the consolidation of all government agencies responsible for farm and non-farm related housing. The sixteen agencies/companies were merged into the National Housing Agency (NHA). The NHA was responsible for correlating the entire official effort to finance direct construction on behalf of public agencies, as well as for stimulating private initiative. When ordering the concentration of these financing agencies the president

¹Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense: A Review of the Role of Housing in Relation to America's Defense and a Program for Action*, (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1940), p. 1.

²Robert Moore Fisher, *20 years of Public Housing: Economic Aspects of the Federal Program*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 74.

³Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, p. 31.

⁴Donald Albrecht, ed., *World War II and the American Dream*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 92.

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stated: "Housing in the United States has become a permanent problem."⁵ This remained true through the remainder of the war years and was even more evident during the postwar adjustment period.

The National Housing Agency consisted of three operating bodies: the *Federal Housing Administration* (responsible for insured mortgages, and handling priorities for all privately-built housing), the *Public Housing Authority* (by absorbing both defense and low-income housing agencies, it became responsible for all publicly financed housing construction), and the *Federal Home Loan Bank Administration* (financing home ownership and construction). The NHA was charged with administering a one billion dollar building program and was eventually responsible for putting up 414,000 units during the war period. Even these figures show the failure of the United States' response to the housing shortage. According to one source, before the war, it was estimated that a minimum of 615,000 units would be required, and the bulk should have been up and completed by the summer of 1942. At this time, however, not a third of the 414,000 that were eventually completed were ready for occupancy.⁶

There were many other obstacles to America's response to the challenge for providing defense housing besides bureaucratic reshuffling. A certain order of precedence overtook many concerns, and wartime demands simply did not permit the desired increase in the volume of housing available to the nation. Men, materials, and facilities could not be spared for socially desirable housing when they were also required for the production of desperately needed weapons. These competing requirements existed throughout the economy. Construction engineers and construction labor were needed on projects directly related to the war, such as the defense manufacturing plants or housing for the military. It was the same story with materials. Some of the most important building materials, especially iron, steel, zinc, and tin were urgently needed for immediate armament production. Plumbing, wiring, and other items of house construction competed with direct military and more essential civilian requirements for critical materials and production facilities. An undirected expansion of private housing (i.e., letting the marketplace take care of itself) could not be permitted because newly built facilities for defense production made it necessary to provide housing at certain critical geographic locations, not just where the competitive forces of the free market would have it happen. The national need could not permit the risk.⁷

At the beginning of World War II, some analysts believed that there would be no general labor shortages, scarcity of materials, or failures in the transportation system.⁸ Building was in an upswing anyway, and unlike what happened during World War I, the government now had some experience with low-cost housing. Technical advances of materials and designers, although facing some resistance, had also shown progress in the low-priced field. However, many of the same problems occurred, and many of the same mistakes were made.⁹ It was still necessary to establish a priority of claims on material supplies, to

⁵ Julius Hirsch, *Price Control in the War Economy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1943), p. 258.

⁶ Terry Walton, *Miracle of World War II: How American Industry Made Victory Possible*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 66.

⁷ David Novick, Melvin Anshen, and W.C. Truppner, *Wartime Production Controls*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949) p. 17.

⁸ Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, p. 31.

⁹ Novick, p. 3.

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conserve critical materials through the limitation or prohibition of non-essential uses, and to schedule production.

By its very character, warfare caused a reduction in the supply of residential houses and a sharp increase in their demand. More importantly, there was a shifting of large numbers of laborers to shipyards, aircraft plants, and centers of machine industry, causing a significant dislocation of large segments of the national production population. Now for the first time, owing to the possibility of attacks from the sea and air, a considerable part of the American war industry was moved inland from vulnerable coast regions. Many existing workers had to leave their homes, causing one of the greatest wartime migrations in American history.

Another problem with the civilian housing problem was the direct competition of building new housing accommodations for the growing army. In order to shelter the first 1,500,000 men taken into the Army, the government had to build forty-five camp communities with populations ranging from 10,000 to 63,000. By July, 1942, quarters had been supplied to the military forces for 4,919,617 men and for civilian employees attached to the military. This obviously drained off supplies of building materials and all available construction labor. In the face of parallel and competing building activity by the military services the fact that any housing at all was put up for the civilian American war worker is cause for wonder.¹⁰

The War Production Board had difficulties in imposing its own construction policy on the military, and there were failures throughout the area of construction. There was always a problem of getting construction materials for housing projects that were essential to the maintenance of labor resources. For reason of strategic security, many of the new plants were located in out-of-the-way places. In addition, many of them were located in previously unpopulated areas because land could be obtained more readily there. As a consequence, many of the new facilities required the rapid development of housing and community facilities for thousands of workers and their families in places where no community existed. In the very beginning, there was a spartan attitude which assumed that as part of the war effort, the workers could be expected to live in tents and shanties. There was no recognition of the fact that the war might continue for years and that the workers could not be expected to remain at their jobs unless provision was made for their families and for the recreation and other facilities which both they and their families required.¹¹

The housing crisis of World War II was not to be confused with, or compared to, the social shortcoming often referred to in the prewar New Deal rallying cry of a "national one third ill-housed."¹² The war saw too many persons in too few rooms, tent cities with primitive plumbing or none at all, jalopies and tin lizzies by the road serving as bed & bath for entire families; dangerously located trailer camps, and "hot beds" in boarding establishments (so called because they never cooled off in their round-the-clock use by two and three renters daily). Hygienic standards were unknown. The alternative was often tent camps and shanty towns.¹³ Compared to these earlier problems, during World War II, at least the federal government recognized and was addressing the housing shortage.

¹⁰Walton, p. 67.

¹¹Novick, p. 302.

¹²Walton., p. 65.

¹³Ibid., p. 64.

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The defense housing problem was finally recognized when it became difficult to get the workers to man the factories. By late 1943, when the problem was fully appraised, shortages, of material and labor were so acute that it was extremely difficult to develop programs which met the housing need and did not cut across military requirements of critical urgency. But even when programs were developed and approved, they frequently failed because an effort was made to execute them with a minimum of interference with local real estate and building contractor operations. Finally, by 1944, the lumber supply which was the key to the construction problem dwindled to a point where even authorized construction with the highest priority assistance could not obtain the materials necessary for completion.¹⁴ In this way, the construction program muddled throughout to the end of the war and afterwards.

Lumber became critical later in the war than most other basic materials. It became a substitute for critical metal wherever possible, and it was often used in products that were the result of indirect military demand. The greatest demand for lumber, for example, was as a shipping material, not as a principal production component in armament materials.¹⁵

With the scarce supply of materials a primary concern, a majority of defense housing projects were constructed at federal expense and under direct federal supervision. In these projects there were two general types of structures which were constructed in defense "villages." Those classified as *temporary* were to supply "decent, comfortable wartime shelter," but they were not built for long usage and "would become slums of the future if allowed to remain indefinitely as housing." *Permanent* housing was defined as "demountable ... for the most part suitable for permanent residential use." The term "demountable" was preferred over "prefabricated," to which critics answered: "That's the best thing we know about them: they can be demounted after the war."¹⁶ Even though at the beginning of the war, reports stated that there were only dubious advantages in cost or time (if any) using temporary housing, more importantly, and in light of experience from the previous war, the housing was rarely temporary. Once erected and occupied, they became a permanent part of the community.¹⁷ Thus many Washington planners displayed a marked preference for prefabricated homes at the war's outset, even though this construction technique was still an unproven experiment at the time. No matter the type of housing, the communities in which these houses were hastily constructed often showed little planning. With more than twenty-five million men, women, and children crowding into the new centers of war industry, some correspondents surveying the social impact of these defense communities felt that the fabric of American life had unraveled.¹⁸

The alternative to federally-constructed defense housing was rarely better. The private home building industry managed to serve civilians just as shabbily as direct government efforts. Badly managed, buried in red tape, and ruthlessly overridden by priorities, the private sector did not provide many solutions to the housing crisis. Even if materials and labor were readily available, few in the private sector would step up to "do their patriotic duty." Experience in earlier wars and in Germany proved that private entrepreneurs

¹⁴Novick, p. 302.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁶Walton, p. 66.

¹⁷Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, p. 75.

¹⁸Albrecht, p. 91.

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would not build on a large scale at their own risk where the chances were likely that shortly after the armistice, only ghost towns would be left in the new industrial centers formed just for the war efforts. In light of the fact that building materials and labor were scarce, private sector response to the need for defense housing occurred almost exclusively under government guarantee for the capital and of course under close government supervision.¹⁹ Compounding the problems for private sector response was the fact that local communities supported a common municipal resentment against "row housing" and implemented building and zoning regulations impeding the construction of private defense villages.²⁰

In spite of numerous negative reports on the conditions present at several defense plant villages, many others managed to present a nearly idyllic suburban-type of community. Oxford Village in Philadelphia was said to have "thrived" in its "'suburban' atmosphere with the activities of hobby clubs, boy scouts, and community meetings in the community center; play yards; and community newspapers."²¹ Edgar Kaiser, director of Oregon Shipyards, took control of the new community Vanport because, as one of his employees explained:

From the outset we recognized the relationship of proper housing and adequate facilities because we have had much experience on engineering jobs in remote places. The way people live and the way their families are cared for are bound to be reflected in production.²²

In ten months time, Vanport was a community complete with seven hundred twenty-three apartment buildings, five schools, six nursery schools, five social buildings, a police station, four commercial shopping centers, a post office, sixteen playgrounds, three fire stations, an administration building, a library, a one hundred-thirty bed infirmary, and a theater. This carefully designed community did not arise haphazardly, but under the consultation of nationally known planner J.W. Moscovitz.²³

A serious deficiency in housing continued after the war. There had been a continuous wartime decline in the production of building-essential materials such as lumber and brick, and no effort was made to plan a postwar program that would direct the available supplies of these materials to the most essential uses. With the unprecedented numbers of returning veterans, defense housing played a critical role in the attempt to solve the housing problem in the United States. In 1945, the Federal government postponed the demolition of temporary housing indefinitely, and Title V of the Lanham Act opened the remaining defense housing to returning veterans.²⁴

¹⁹Hirsch, pp. 265-266.

²⁰Walton, pp. 67-68.

²¹Carol Benenson Perloff and Abby Victor, "Oxford Village Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, n.d. Section 8, page 5.

²²Albrecht, p. 120.

²³Ibid., p. 122.

²⁴Ibid., p. 134.

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The Federal Housing Administration: Its role in lending and design

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) came out of the New Deal era, where an attempt to encourage a revival of building occurred by a variety of means. In addition to direct federal programs, there were also various agencies which were set up to promote the construction of homes by the private sector. The Federal Housing Administration insured private mortgages for approved projects against loss from default, making it possible for lenders (mortgagees) to go up to eighty percent or even ninety percent of the value of the dwelling at an extremely low interest rate. It tried to accomplish aims similar to that of the private bank system: to directly insure, under certain conditions, mortgages on residential property made by private institutions.

Just prior to the start of the World War II, there was an ample supply of capital and a willingness to make it available at low rates of interest and for the long periods. The existence of these liberal terms, due in large part of the influence of the federal financial agencies, was chiefly responsible for the expansion of the low-priced housing market. Developers were able to take risks in areas they might not have considered before. There were still problems with the rental housing field, however. The availability of mortgage capital and liberal lending terms was less likely to be a problem than the availability of equity capital. Even when the mortgage insurance plan of the FHA reduced the down payment to as low as 10 percent of the total valuation, it was often difficult to come up with the cash equity for large rental projects. Single-family home builder's needs can usually be financed with short-term credits, but this was not the case with rental projects. Before World War II, a considerable investment was required on the part of the owner of a rental-unit development.²⁵ Up to the war, this equity money was scarce. Not until just prior to the start of World War II were financial institutions, such as insurance companies, authorized to make ownership investments in rental housing properties.²⁶

From its inception, the Federal Housing Administration not only influenced interest rates and the direction and flow of money, but it influenced the standards and design of housing as well.²⁷ The first rental-housing development to be financed with a mortgage insured by the Federal Housing Administration was begun in April 1935. Colonial Village in Arlington County, Virginia inaugurated a new departure in housing finance - the development of rental units in garden-type apartments and grouped houses subject to high-percentage, long-term, amortized mortgages.²⁸ These types projects had rapid occupancy, the key (along with good planning and management) to securing the investment. This FHA program was almost the only available avenue to the financing of rental properties prior to the war.

A notable result of the FHA rental-housing program was the advancement of the concept of the garden-type apartment. From the outset, the FHA was insistent on its requirements of low land coverage, ample sunlight, and ventilation. It was instrumental in the improvement of standards of design and planning along these lines, and was able to demonstrate in all sections of the country that apartments need not be dark, cramped, or without the amenities of normal family life. The amenities of insured properties which included

²⁵Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, p. 93.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁸"FHA Experience With Rental Housing," *Insured Mortgage Portfolio* 4 (April 1940): 11.

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space, health and convenience proved to increase tenant appeal and retard obsolescence. Coupled with comparatively lower rentals, these developments assured steadier income, thus making the investments in this type of mortgage more attractive.²⁹ Mortgages for rental housing, after all, were investment vehicles for banks and other groups, such as insurance companies. At this time, mortgages insured by the FHA represented a unique mortgage investment so far as safety was concerned, and at the same time gave a yield that was in 1940, in excess of the yields obtainable from other investments comparable in risk.³⁰ War, however, introduced a need for speed and economy. Private financing and private building had to be mobilized to its maximum potential in order to meet wartime requirements and time schedules.

During World War II, the FHA assumed a major and basic role in stimulating a sharply expanded volume of private home construction. While the government's primary concern was to produce the maximum amount of new housing in areas of expanding defense industry, other considerations were presented to the lending institutions which supplied the long-term mortgage money. One consideration is the desire to maintain the maximum possible quality, both in construction and location, in order to avoid the adjustment in the post-war period. Sound procedures in financing was also important to the companies so as to minimize the possibilities of excessive losses and defaults after the emergency was terminated. It was naturally the desire of the government to maximize the participation by private capital and to limit federally-financed defense housing construction, leaving the government for more important production of armaments.³¹ Thus when certain areas of the country were designated as having an actual or impending shortage of housing, the Federal Housing Administration was directed into those areas in hopes of stimulating private investment.

FHA and Its Influence over Site Planning

In the early part of the twentieth century, land speculation nationwide had led to poor site developments. The opportunities for swift profits had lured developers into subdivision projects of "ever lower standards of dimension and quality, done wholly without landscape architectural help."³² Gridiron streets forced onto undulating topography were typically found throughout the country. Speculative developers quickly laid out streets on the outskirts of metropolitan area which often remained bare for years. Unplanned projects were effectively stopped, however, when the Federal government established a professionally oriented Land Planning Division within the Federal Housing Administration in 1934. Now before granting approval to guarantee mortgage loans, the FHA now insisted that the developer present a general plan acceptable to the Land Planning Division. The Division gave advice freely, and published several pamphlets which aided developers with their plans, starting with *Land Planning Bulletin No. 1: Successful Subdivisions*.

The bulletin acquainted developers with the benefits of land planning and demonstrated the application of its fundamental principles. With land planning, it was felt that a developer could reduce the number of

²⁹Ibid., p. 24.

³⁰"Analyzing the Mortgage Portfolio," *Insured Mortgage Portfolio* 5 (Fourth Quarter 1940): 38.

³¹"The FHA's Role in Defense Housing," *Insured Mortgage Portfolio* 5 (Second Quarter 1941): 5.

³²Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), p. 643.

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elements which could contribute to the rapid depreciation of residential neighborhoods and the corresponding decline in property values. Thus the risk is reduced for both the developer and the FHA. As the bulletin pointed out, one of the least recognized causes for subdivision failure was poor design. Many of the recommendations in this brochure can be found in the FHA approved plans for President Gardens, including:

Selection of land: location should be suitable for a definite and evident market.

Subdivision plan: secure the advice of a competent land planner. Preserve natural features of site for purchaser appeal and low construction cost. Rough or wooded land set aside for park purposes will more than pay for its cost. ... Segregate uses.

Protection of neighborhood: Plan lots to face into the tract rather than on uncontrolled land; screen objectionable views and traffic; limit entrances and discourage main through traffic; record suitable protective covenants.³³

Additionally, the bulletin advised planning for commercial site locations, recommending that they be concentrated as a group and not a series of unrelated stores. Natural features of the site should be preserved; streets should conform to these natural conditions by fitting the contours of irregular land. Dead-end streets should be avoided, and traffic should flow toward thoroughfare. The lots should be protected against major street traffic.³⁴

Although the bulletin pointed out that the Land Planning Division of the FHA was not trying to replace the services of a professional land planner, this was not what happened in reality. While this pamphlet and others published by the Division did much to raise the quality of plans presented for FHA approval, it did nothing to increase the workload for landscape architectural firms across the country. As it typical of entrepreneurs response to imposed standards, rather than treating the FHA standards as the minimum requirements, they soon became the maximum goal to be met by the developer. Developers were able to use the free advice of the FHA in laying out landscape designs. As developers followed the FHA models, some critics contended that the sameness of curvaceous pattern that was typical of FHA subdivisions was dull, and was no less tedious than the gridiron streets they replaced.³⁵

Subdivisions were not the only method of solving the nation's housing shortage during this period. During this period, the United States Housing Authority published excellent advisory pamphlets dealing with the planning of low-rent housing projects. Housing projects had many advantages, in a planning sense, over subdivisions. Road layout, the bane of modern site planning, does not get top priority when individual lots and street access for each dwelling unit (seen as necessary with single-family subdivisions) are not required. More attention can thus be given to the creation of positive outdoor spaces, and the whole project is treated in terms of spatial composition.³⁶ Outdoor space, quite simply, is not a leftover or an accident, but is planned. Budgets for site development naturally varied from case to case, with publicly-

³³Federal Housing Administration, *Land Planning Bulletin No. 1: Successful Subdivisions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, rev. March 1941), p. 12.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 13-19.

³⁵Newton, pp. 644-645.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 645.

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funded defense housing projects typically suffering.

In late 1930s, the United States Housing Authority set basic standards for architects to follow in site planning and unit design for publicly financed low-rent housing projects. These standards reflected the recommendations of the American Public Health Association. Although FHA projects were not required to follow these standards, much as with their own bulletin, the USHA standards provided convenient guidelines for any developer of low-rent apartment housing. Solid planning principles were expounded in this bulletin which, if followed, gave developers guidance that was sorely missing in earlier projects. Regarding the need and importance of site planning for such projects, it noted that:

A housing project provides the framework for a way of life for its inhabitants, which must be set within the larger framework of the neighborhood and the community. The organization and physical expression of this planned framework constitute site planning.³⁷

The needs of families may have determined the scale and arrangement of units, but many of those needs could not be satisfied within the dwelling unit alone. Privacy, sunlight, and air circulation were affected by the location of and relationship between dwelling units. The arrangement of buildings on a site had to take into account those factors, as well as the obvious requirements of access, circulation, and aesthetics. Added to this were the needs for social contact, active and passive leisure-time activities, and common services. Those needs had to be considered by the site planner.

Like the FHA bulletin, the USHA bulletin presented many common planning principles of site planning of the period, such as the *superblock*. The superblock was defined as a relatively large area, usually containing one or more common open spaces, and bounded in whole or in part by through traffic streets (but not intersected by such streets). Cul-de-sac or dead-end streets may be used to give internal access, and are shaped and sized so as to discourage any but local interior traffic.³⁸ Directly related to the superblock were a number of corollary principles, including:

The articulated street pattern. The design and construction of streets and walks to serve particular functions, which gives an economy of paving and utility, as well as privacy to residential areas and freedom from traffic hazards. All streets need not be constructed in anticipation of future expansion, but are designed and constructed for the particular use they were planned for.

The appropriate *planning for use of all open spaces* and the arrangement of buildings on the site to give concentration of these spaces.³⁹

In addition to guidelines for site planning, the USHA set standards for the individual dwelling units and buildings. Their objective was to provide healthy, habitable spaces for low-rent housing, and while not meant to be used as a "formula," the guidelines served to provide good information for housing for defense plant workers as well. Modern planning principals dictated that bedrooms should open directly on to a common hall without passage through another room. Bathrooms should be convenient to bedrooms and

³⁷United States Housing Authority, *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects: Planning the Site* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 7.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁹*Ibid.*

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also open onto a common hall. Each room should have direct outside exposure with a window or windows. Glass area in each room except kitchens should be at least 25 per cent of the net floor area. The exterior design of the buildings "should be pleasing, as well as economical, through a skillful handling of mass, proportion, placing of openings, color, and textures without the need for carving, cornices, and other embellishments." Repetition of building types need not result in monotony, and buildings may be adapted to topography.⁴⁰

The President Gardens Apartments development benefited from the knowledge of the information present in these pamphlets and, like a other FHA "garden apartment" projects, was able to combine skillful site planning with conscientious design of rental apartment units. Thus low-cost rental units were provided in a setting that promoted community feelings.

Defense industries in Kansas City: The Pratt and Whitney Engine Plant

Unlike in World War I, where the armament industries were concentrated on coastal areas in places where industry was already prevalent, during World War II defense plants were placed around the country in consideration of the "new menace from the air." With the threat of air attacks a possibility, it was important to avoid concentrations of plants and to extend the distances between. The concept of "factories in the fields" or locations detached from large cities offered distinct military advantages C the plants could be better hidden or camouflaged, and at the same time by their distance from the nearest city, offer some protection to the community. Many of the plants themselves, particularly those involved with the production of explosives, were dangerous sites. With electric power and the ease of automobile and motor bus transportation, factories were freed from the necessity of being placed within the boundaries of closely built cities.⁴¹

In response to Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939, industry began to gear up in the United States. In addition to newly constructed and federally operated defense plants, across the country a large part of defense production included plants that were wholly or partially converted from production of peacetime materials to the production of war products. In Kansas City, the majority of money spent on defense industries went into already existing firms or facilities. In Kansas City the automobile manufacturers changed production, with the Ford plant manufacturing military vehicle components, and the Chevrolet and Fisher plants making artillery ammunition. Many other industries continued in their original field, just changing the product to fit war-time needs. Garment makers produced uniforms; electronics and metal-fabricators such as Kansas City Structural Steel, Butler Manufacturing, and Wilcox Electric were all heavily involved with defense contracts.⁴²

In the Kansas City area, the Federal government acted primarily as a purchaser of manufactured items rather than as a producer. Four large plants were constructed in the area by the government but were operated by private firms. North American Aviation employed 28,000 workers at its peak, building B-25

⁴⁰United States Housing Authority, *Bulletin No. 12 on Policy and Procedure: Dwelling Unit Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 1938)., pp. 1-12.

⁴¹Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, p. 52.

⁴²Sherry Lamb Schirmer and Richard D. McKinzie, *At the River's Bend* (Marceline, MO.: Windsor Publications, 1982), p. 230.

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medium bombers in the Fairfax district. At the Lake City Arsenal, Remington Arms served as the contract operator producing small-arms ammunition.⁴³ The Sunflower Ordnance Plant located sixteen miles east of Lawrence, Kansas was operated by Hercules Powder Company and was the world's largest rocket powder plant.⁴⁴ Just south of the Kansas City limits, Pratt and Whitney manufactured aircraft engines in a plant built by the government.

United Aircraft Corporation was one of the two major manufacturers of air-cooled, radial engines in the United States, and Pratt & Whitney was one of three major divisions of the corporation. The parent plant of Pratt & Whitney was located in Connecticut, and the plant in Kansas City was a satellite plant of that enterprise. Satellite plants were generally located out from the parent plant and traditional industrial areas. During World War II, 1,597 new plants were constructed, and 899 of these were government-owned. Many of them were built on sites that were previously agricultural fields.⁴⁵ The groundwork for the plan for satellite, shadow, or branch plants was outlined by William Knudsen. The plan took into account vital manufacturing requirements C transport facilities, materials, parts and subassembly manufacturing, electric power sources, and stable labor supplies. But politics stepped in to direct the decentralization movement, and there was a definite trend toward the South, the traditional stronghold of the Democrats who controlled the U.S. Congress. Texas alone captured 31 percent of the total investment in war production.⁴⁶ Knudsen originally planned for many of these sites to be located 'behind the mountains' in order to obviate any special military protection and to have the plant out of harm's way. Instead, many plants were constructed on flat plains for purely political reasons. However, other factors were above and beyond the grasp of public officials. Areas in Kansas and Missouri had already been extensively developed in the time between the two great wars as civilian aviation production centers and had a valuable nucleus of trained aircraftmen. To take advantage of their presence, a vast beehive of aviation industry was crowded into this section during World War II. A Curtiss-Wright plant was built at St. Louis; a second auxiliary plant of North American Aviation was set up in Kansas City; and Boeing Airplane allocated new plant space in Wichita, which long before the war had appropriated the appellation "Crossroads of the Air."⁴⁷ The Pratt & Whitney satellite of United Aircraft Corporation was one of the last airplane plants to be located in this midwestern cradle of air manufacturing.

Earlier in the war, United Aircraft Corporation had refused to build another Pratt & Whitney plant inland from their East Hartford, Connecticut plant. In the face of developments in the spring of 1942, the Navy asked them to reconsider. The War Department suggested that manpower and housing might be available in Kansas City, and with the War Production Board and Navy representatives, staff of United Aircraft came to the city. They flew over an abandoned race track at the city's southern outskirts and studied the valley below, flanked by farms. The company studied factors such as electric power, water supply, transportation, and the education qualifications of the citizens. All of the factors studied spoke favorably to the idea of

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴David Dary, *Pictorial History of Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas* (Lawrence, KS.: Allen Books, 1992), p. 321.

⁴⁵Walton, p. 268.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 270.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 271-272.

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locating a plant in Kansas City, but the high percentage of citizens with the equivalent of a high school diploma or better exactly suited the training for the single-purpose, single-operation production which was planned.⁴⁸

Although politics may have not played a large part in the selection of Kansas City for the plant, Senator Harry S Truman was happy to report on May 23, 1942 that an eighty-five million dollar plant would be built there by the Navy.⁴⁹ The site included the old Speedway in the vicinity of Holmes and Bannister roads southwest of Dodson. The air-cooled, radial engines which were to be built were planned for powering the Republic Thunderbolt plane and the new navy fighter, the Vought Corsair. Others bombers powered by engines built in Kansas City included those manufactured by Consolidated, Douglas, and Lockheed. The plant would be the largest in the immediate area, and would further swell the production already done by the car industry plants in Kansas City.

397 acres were acquired at a cost of \$150,000. The plant was planned by the Navy and built by the Turner Construction company of New York and the Long Construction company of Kansas City, with the New York firm acting principally in a supervisory capacity. Plant excavation work began on July 6, 1942. A year later, parts were already coming out for the engines. Structural steel could not be used for the plant, as it had been with earlier rush jobs such as the North American plant. By the time construction was underway, lumber was as scarce as steel. The plant was therefore built primarily of non-critical materials; i.e., brick and concrete.

Dirt cut from the hillside to make room for one wing of the plant was used for fill for the street car tracks into the plant property. The Defense Plant corporation owned the double-tracked extension from the Dodson line to the site, as well as the additional track which was erected to the end of the Country club line in Waldo. Other off-site work relating to the project included the widening and extension of Troost from the city limits to Bannister Road, with a branch road leading to the plant. This was erected by the state and county highway departments with federal funds.⁵⁰

Because of wartime labor conditions, wartime plants had to use inexperienced workers for production with each new manufacturing center built, and an extensive training program was necessary to equip the employees for the skilled work. United Aircraft carefully screened job applicants for the Kansas City plant from the upper Mississippi valley. Although airplane building had become fairly well established in this area, engine manufacturing was not, especially the intricate engine of the Pratt & Whitney company. Selecting two hundred fifty of the most promising young men, United Aircraft took them to its home plant in New England where they received classroom instruction in engine theory and current practices in production methods. The widest opportunities possible in the limited time available were extended to the trainees to familiarize themselves with the details of building the air-cooled, internal combustion powerplants. They then returned to Kansas City where they in turn taught new and larger groups of local

⁴⁸Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Division, United Aircraft Corporation, "The Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Story," (n.p.: United Aircraft Corporation, August 1950), p. 136.

⁴⁹"Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Plant" Newspaper clipping files, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Missouri Public Library, *Kansas City Star* 24 May 1942.

⁵⁰"Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Plant" Newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* 4 July 1943.

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hands.⁵¹ Workers for Pratt & Whitney were trained in a building at 27th and Main. 3,000 trainees at a time were handled in three daily shifts.⁵²

Providing management for the new, war-forged factories was even more difficult than training production workers. Many satellites were larger than the home plants, yet a splintering of management to the satellites was perceived as a weakening of the parent company. Pratt & Whitney transferred only twenty-eight members of the East Hartford executive staff to the new Kansas City subsidiary. The original two hundred fifty workers who were sent east for training became foremen and supervisors, serving well in the lower production ranks and strengthening the force of 25,000 local workers who were eventually employed.

The Kansas City plant appeared to have several obstacles against it. It was the last of the large industrial war constructions, and thus was near the bottom in the list of priorities. Manpower had already been drained off from the Kansas City region; if not already engaged in the North American Aviation bomber production in the Fairfax district, workers were engaged in the manufacture of explosives or ammunition. Missourians additionally had little background in the metal-cutting industry. Nevertheless, a three million square foot plant, all under one roof, was built, making it larger than the parent plant.⁵³

Before the plant was even constructed, however, it became apparent to the Pratt & Whitney organization that the engine planned for production would soon be obsolete; the air war was a technical and performance race. Therefore, under great odds, Pratt Whitney implemented a new design requiring development of new manufacturing methods. Many executives at Pratt Whitney did not believe that this new engine could be produced by the "cheerful Missourians" with "their easy ways, their drawling speech and their happy outlook". When inspecting the Missouri plant in the process of being built in 1943, William Knudsen surveyed the great gaps in tooling, assessed the Missourian's non-metal background, the lack of manpower, and said with a gloomy shake of his head, "I'm going to be a surprised man if we ever get a single engine out of this plant. If we do, it probably won't run."⁵⁴ Despite the less than enthusiastic outlook, the plant met the company's expectations. In one eighteen month period starting in 1943, 7,931 engines of Pratt Whitney's "C" model were churned out of the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Corporation of Missouri plant.⁵⁵

SIGNIFICANCE: President Gardens Apartments

Growth in general home building actually declined in Kansas City from 1919 to 1945, leading to a housing shortage considered severe by local residents by the time World War II was in full swing. During the Depression of the 1930s, when the federal Public Works Administration tried to ease the nation's need for low-cost housing by erecting housing projects throughout the country, Kansas City's city administration

⁵¹Walton, pp. 274-275.

⁵²"Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Plant" Newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* 13 August 1942.

⁵³"Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Division, "The Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Story", p. 137.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 141.

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during this time stated that "no slums exist in Kansas City," and turned down federal aid for slum clearance.⁵⁶ When defense plant workers came to the city during World War II, the population in the metropolitan area swelled by about 30,000. By 1942, the housing shortage was so acute that 9,359 store rooms were occupied as dwellings. In 1943, the Real Estate Board reported an occupancy rate of ninety-six percent.⁵⁷ Two low-rent housing projects were finally begun in Kansas City during the mid-1940s, but the need for housing in Kansas City was far more extensive than could be met by these two projects.

Although there is no doubt that the number of defense plant workers who moved to the Kansas City metropolitan area during World War II added to the housing shortage problems, in reality the city was better off than many other areas across the country. Just prior to the start of the war, census data showed that Kansas City had an 8.2% vacancy rate. This was the third highest of cities listed in one report, with only Hoboken, New Jersey and Miami, Florida having higher vacancy rates.⁵⁸ This comparatively high vacancy rate shows that Kansas City had more to offer a potential defense factory than the education level of its citizens. Builders were still allowed to construct single family dwellings, duplexes, and multiple-dwelling units in order to help ease the housing shortage during the war years. Some of the single-family homes were sold, while the other units were rented at Office of Price Administration (O.P.A.) ceilings. Initially, these units could be occupied only by defense workers, but were later opened to the general public at the close of the war.⁵⁹

The idea of erecting a housing community for workers at the Pratt and Whitney engine plant, with the thought that the plant would be converted after the war, began to be discussed with the start of production at the plant in 1943. The President Gardens housing project was developed under section 608 of the FHA rental housing provisions, which provided FHA insurance of an approved private loan. The plans, designed by Gentry & Voskamp architects of Kansas City, were approved, as was the financing plans of the mortgage holder, the National Life Insurance Company of Montpelier, Vermont, by the district office of the Federal Housing Administration.⁶⁰ The FHA also guaranteed a \$2,300,000 loan made by the National Life Insurance Company. The mortgage for the development was in the name of the President Gardens Company, Herman S. Shapiro president.⁶¹

The first notice of the proposed project in construction trade publications occurred in September 1944, which noted that the final plans were still in progress.⁶² With production at the plant in high gear, however,

⁵⁶Alice Lanterman & Virginia Sheaff, *Your City and You: The Story of Kansas City* (Kansas City, MO.: Board of Education, 1947), p. 180.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

⁵⁸Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, pp. 187-191.

⁵⁹Lanterman., p. 182.

⁶⁰"President Gardens Housing Project -- Troost & 83rd" newspaper clipping files, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library, *Kansas City Star* (1944).

⁶¹"President Gardens Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (18 August 1946).

⁶²Mid-West Contractor 86 (6 September 1944): 10.

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construction on the Gardens started shortly thereafter in 1944 with the staking off of the site and interior roads.⁶³ The housing project was referred to as a "garden apartment" development, with thirty-six buildings planned on thirty-seven acres. The buildings were all named for presidents; the largest units contained twenty four apartments, the smallest four. Winding roads, changes of grade, a low, central park, and landscaping were features which emphasized the "garden" idea. Also included in the plans at the Troost Avenue entrance were a community center, a grocery store, drug store, two shops, and project offices.⁶⁴

A factor in the selection of the site was obviously the proximity of the Pratt & Whitney engine plant located one mile south. A few blocks to the south was 85th Street, which contained the Dodson street car line, now routed to the Pratt & Whitney plant. At the time of its construction, President Gardens was just five blocks south of Kansas City's city limits. 1500 residents were expected to fill the 444 apartments units contained in the thirty-six buildings. The site was already well known to many Kansas Citians; President Gardens was situated upon a portion of the late George W. Hale's farm.⁶⁵ He was the fire chief of Kansas City, and in the 1890s his farm was well known as the site of many parties and early day fire horse training.

Fifteen miles across the city, a project which mirrored the development at President Gardens in many ways was completed near the end of 1944. The Fairfax Hills "garden apartment" development was constructed in Kansas City, Kansas for workers at the North American Aviation Bomber plant. Unlike the bare, minimal housing constructed by the federal government for defense workers in many other places, these two projects featured quality site planning wooded, hilly sites. In addition to the brick apartment dwelling units at these sites, there were planned shopping centers, parking space, central heating systems, landscaping, and playgrounds as added amenities.

As the project was intended for plant workers, a fair rent was required in order to insure the return on the investors money. Utilizing many of the methods promoted by the USHA for low-rental housing, the designers were able to construct units which could rent for reasonable rates. Typical "low-price" apartment developments during the mid-twentieth century generally utilized the following features or principles in order to reduce costs:

- Buildings generally one or two stories high.

- No startling modifications of customary structural system.

- Buildings produced from carefully engineered plans, capable of using stock sizes of materials with a minimum of waste.

- Lowered material and overhead costs by standardizing production on the basis of these plans, thus eliminating individual changes. Monotony is avoided by varied use of color in roofs, trim; by variations in groupings and orientation of buildings; and by variations in prominent exterior features such as doorways and porches.

- Improved purchasing position by carrying on large-sized operations.

- Concentrating efforts in locations where land is cheap and where few difficulties from building codes

⁶³"President Gardens Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (1944).

⁶⁴The small commercial area is still extant, but the property owners of these buildings did not want to be included in this National Register nomination.

⁶⁵"President Gardens Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (1944).

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or hyper-conservative municipal administrations were encountered.⁶⁶

The development at President Gardens was reflective of many of these principles. The buildings were two stories high and were of simple construction. It was a large-scale operation C the largest such housing development in the Kansas City area at the time. The 444 units required construction of 1,736 major rooms, which utilized stock sizes of materials. Today, the use of brick may seem an expensive feature, but during the war years brick was considered a "non-critical" material, while lumber was actually more difficult to acquire. The site was outside of the Kansas City limits, therefore no city building codes had to be adhered to, only those as established by Jackson County. The same basic building block of four apartment units flanking a central hall was repeated throughout the entire project. Monotony of construction was avoided by varying the design of the accentuated entry doors, the use of different roof types, and by altering the arrangement of the basic building block. As previously noted, the buildings contained anywhere from four to twenty four apartment units. The blocks were combined in straight lines to form simple rectangular buildings; with slightly offset wings; in a "U-shape"; and in an "L-shape."

The uneven site at President Gardens was another key factor in helping prevent institutional monotony. A small brook traversed the site north and south, and a heavily wooded section had twenty-two varieties of mature trees. During the planning phase, architect Alonzo H. Gentry noted that the placement of the buildings emphasized the outlooks at the site, as well took advantage of the prevailing southwest breeze.

The architectural firm of Gentry and Voskamp were listed as the designers of record.⁶⁷ Alonzo Gentry, a native of Independence, Missouri, graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with an electrical engineering degree. He later received a Bachelor of Architecture from Columbia University in 1916. In 1923, Gentry established his own firm, which he practiced from until his retirement in 1961. In 1931, he incorporated his office under the name of Alonzo H. Gentry, Voskamp & Neville, Architects.⁶⁸ The firm was noted for its design of apartments, and hotels in the 1930s. Among Gentry's outstanding works are the Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City; built in 1935, it was called by the *Architectural Record* one of the ten best buildings in the world that year. His firm also designed the Truman Library (determined eligible for the NR in 1998), Research Hospital, and the General George C. Marshall library at the Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.⁶⁹ The Colonial Revival style, popular for many classes of residential development, was simply but eloquently utilized on the apartments by the designers. Multi-paned windows provided a necessary segmentation of large wall surfaces of brick, and the varying designs of the accentuated doorways featured comparatively elaborate entries for otherwise simple buildings. Quickly planned to meet the immediate need for housing defense plant workers, the apartment still provided decent housing for its residents and a good return for its investors.

⁶⁶Twentieth Century Fund, *Housing for Defense*, pp. 81- 82.

⁶⁷ Apparently the architectural firm prepared the site plans as well as the building drawings, unlike the similar Fairfax Hills project, which utilized the planning services of the nationally known landscape architectural firm of Hare & Hare.

⁶⁸S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., *Missouri Democracy: A History of the Party and Its Representative Members -- Past & Present* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Inc. 1935) p. 681.

⁶⁹"Alonzo H. Gentry, Architect, is Dead," *Kansas City Times* (7 February 1967).

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The sponsorship contractors for the President Gardens project were the S. Patti Construction company of Kansas City and the MacDonald Construction company of St. Louis. For the Gardens development, the two firms operated as the Patti-MacDonald Construction Company. They had previously been associated in building the North American bomber plant in Kansas City, Kansas; the Topeka air base; the air base at Herington, Kansas; and Smoky Hill at Salina. The sponsorship group that contributed the site and a cash equity was represented by Abraham Margolin of the law firm of Broders, Reinhardt, Margolin & Winnell.⁷⁰

The O.P.A. originally approved a rent of \$62 for the two bedroom apartments, and \$48.50 for the one bedroom units. By 1946, rent was \$68 per month for the two bedroom units, and \$65 per month for the one bedroom apartments. The apartments were unfurnished except for the gas refrigerators and stoves. Included in the rent was gas, water, and heat. The tenants paid for telephone and electricity. The rooms were considered "more generous in dimension than any housing of like character in the Midwest."⁷¹ There were tile baths, hardwood floors, and ample facilities for laundry. All of the buildings were adjacent to playground and recreational areas, and ample parking areas were provided throughout the development. Roads were designed with easy grades and constantly changing vistas. All structures were "silhouette planted" with new trees along the street. The huge trees which had been preserved in the open areas were trimmed and shaped.⁷²

The first tenants moved into the Gardens September 1, 1945 when there were still wooden sidewalks and no grass. Because of the unfinished appearance of the complex, contemporary descriptions likened the project to a "barracks" or "concentration camp."⁷³ Photographs taken during this period corroborate this description. Applicants for residency at this time needed clearance cards from the war housing center.⁷⁴ The last unit was completed nearly a year later than anticipated on July 6, 1946. By then, curving sidewalks were in place, and the parkways and lawns in front of and between the buildings were sodded. The "garden apartment" environment began to take shape. There were so many hundreds of applications for apartments at this time that management stopped accepting them.

A newspaper article from 1946 marveled at the great "social experiment" which seemed to be working so well at President Gardens. The cause for the article was the annexation of the southern boundaries of Kansas City to 85th Street. The inclusion of 1500 residents of President Gardens in this annexation represented the largest number of people of a separate community added to the city since the annexation of Westport in 1897.

Fifteen hundred refugees from the housing shortage in Kansas City have discovered a new way of living, and like it. [they] are pioneers in what undoubtedly will become a popular and permanent type of residential development C apartment life in the wide open spaces of the suburbs. . . All of the 2-bedroom apartments in President Gardens are

⁷⁰"President Gardens Housing Project -- Troost & 83rd" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (n.d.).

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²"President Gardens Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (18 August 1946).

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴"President Gardens Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (n.d.)

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President Gardens Apartments Historic District
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President Gardens Apartments as it appeared during its construction phase, when residents called it a "concentration camp." Photo from Lanterman, Your City and You.

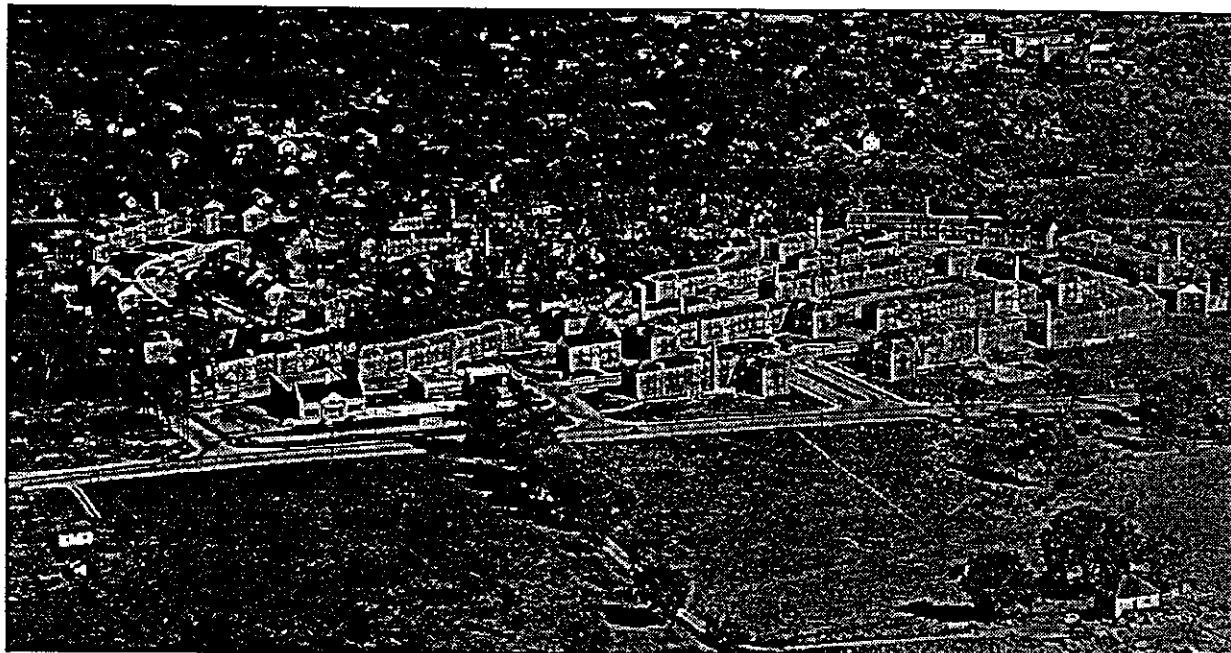
exactly alike. Every head of the family pays the same rent. . . . thus, you do not have the problem of "keeping up with the Joneses" at the Gardens and the results have been amazing. You run into your neighbors the first day at the Gardens. If it isn't in the front hallway . . . it may be the women meeting in the community laundry in the basements or on the shared lawns . . . There are no private porches on which you can hide away from your neighbors. Nor are there any secluded back-yard retreats or recreation rooms in which to "clique" and be alone. The remarkable thing about being thrown together in that way is that it works. There is no place in Kansas City where so many people have become acquainted with so many other people in so short a time. Stripped of the standard social inhibitions in this unusual community experiment, many persons have found a new zest in life simply by knowing their neighbors. . . . It promotes tolerance. . . . A city dweller who visits the Gardens is impressed particularly by the peace of a small town which reigns in the evenings as families get together on the lawns to talk, laugh and watch their children before they are put to bed. Children romp up and down the sidewalks. Their shouts bring no complaints. It's just one of the things that happen under such conditions. . . . No fine home or monument to some politician of the past is pointed to with pride when you visit the Gardens. Instead, the residents will ask if you have seen the Stevenson twins. . . . That is an example of the simplicity and success of family life in the housing project that was started to house Pratt-Whitney workers and has blossomed into Kansas City's biggest housing center.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Ibid.

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President Gardens, probably shortly before the completion of construction. From an undated aerial photo.

Stability for the citizens was provided by the staff, Joe Rock, who was the resident manager and his assistant, Mrs. Mary Mills, both of whom lived in the Gardens. Mrs. Mills maintained a list of babysitters for use for all the mothers (approximately one third of the 1500 residents at the Gardens were children), and provided all sorts of motherly advice. Mr. Rock maintained the thirty-seven acres with a staff of seven men.⁷⁶ As the residents were outside of the urban area of activities, many functions were carried on at President Gardens. There was a Boy Scout headquarters in one of the buildings, and a Residents' Association was formed to promote social activity (although activities were slowed down due to the threat of infantile paralysis during this period). The Association held outdoor shows in the "Gardens Bowl" - the grassy area in the center of the project. Sandboxes were located at the rear of each building, and playground equipment was scattered over the community.

By 1946, nearly all of the men living in President Gardens were World War II veterans.⁷⁷ Defense housing developments were extremely popular choices for returning veterans with new families due to the nation's and Kansas City's continued housing shortage. The housing problem which had already existed prior to World War II was worsened by the fact of Kansas City's population increase during the wartime build-up. Coupled with the high wartime marriage rate and the return of veterans anxious to establish homes, Kansas City faced a housing shortage it had never experienced before. Added to these circumstances the acute shortage of building materials and man power, which made the cost of building a house far too high

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

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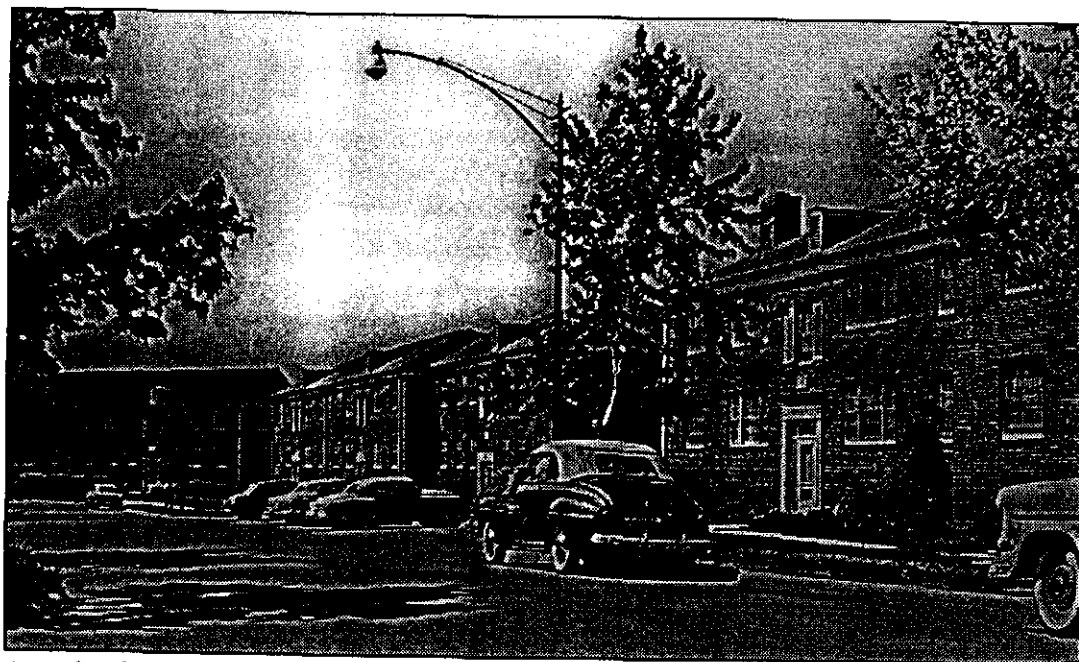
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for the average citizen.⁷⁸ Reasonable rents in apartments geared for families, all situated in a suburban setting made President Gardens an ideal choice for a newly started family during the post-war period.

In 1946, when each new tenant moved in, they received an instruction sheet with the last paragraph summarizing the job of converting the war project into a successful peacetime experiment in housing. It read in part: "with your co-operation we shall endeavor to constantly improve the attractiveness and desirability of your home, the President Gardens."⁷⁹

President Gardens stands today as a reminder of a critical point in the history of the United States, and, especially, the contribution of Kansas City in dealing with the united war effort of World War II. The President Gardens Apartments Historic District is an excellent representative example of a specific housing type from a critical period in the community's history.



An undated photo from Western Historical Manuscript Collection, UMKC.

⁷⁸Lantermann., p. 183.

⁷⁹"President Garden Housing Project" newspaper clipping files, *Kansas City Star* (18 August 1946).

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UTM References (continued):

E. Zone 15 Easting 363845 Northing 4315100

F. Zone 15 Easting 363465 Northing 4315130

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All of the following described real estate, situated in the County of Jackson and State of Missouri, and recorded in the Jackson County Records Office, to wit:

Lot 1, PRESIDENT GARDENS, a subdivision on Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

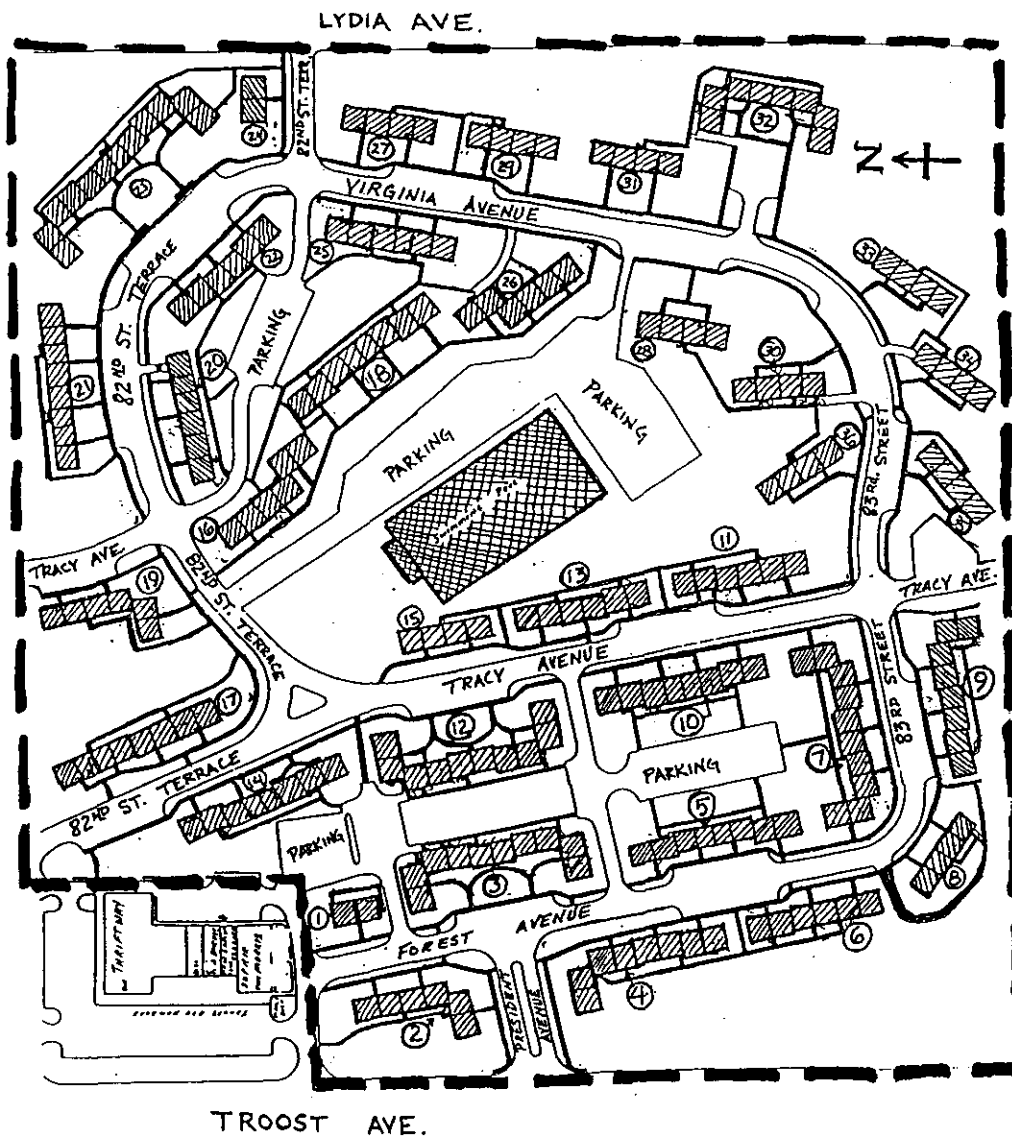
The boundary includes the buildings, open spaces, and streets that have been historically associated with President Gardens Apartments. The parcel of the original development which contains a small commercial strip (Lot 2, President Gardens) has been excluded due to the wishes of the present owners, who are different from the owners of the nominated parcel.

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SITE PLAN: President Gardens Apartments Historic District.



Contributing Building - [diagonal hatching]

Building Number - [circle with number]

Non-contributing - [cross-hatching]

District Boundary - [dashed line]

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President Gardens Apartments Historic District
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816-792-1275
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573-751-7858

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The following information applies to all of the photographs:

District Name: President Gardens Apartments Historic District
County and State: Jackson County, Missouri
Name of Photographer: Brad Finch
Location of Original
Negatives: Three Gables Preservation, 9550 N.E. Cookingham Drive, Kansas City, MO 64157

Further information for each photograph is listed below:

Photo #1:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98
Description of View- Looking east at the main entry and buildings 2 & 3

Photo #2:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98
Description of view- Looking northeast at buildings 1 & 2 along Forest Ave.

Photo #3:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98
Description of view- Looking west at entry door on building 4

Photo #4:

Date of Photo- 8/16/96
Description of view- Looking southeast along curving junction of Forest Avenue and 83rd Street

Photo #5:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98
Description of view- Looking north/northwest at the open space to the rear of buildings 3, 12, & 14

Photo #6:

Date of Photo- 9/5/98
Description of view- Looking northwest at the rear of building 5

Photo #7:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98
Description of view- Looking north along Tracy Ave., lined with buildings 10, 11, 12, 13, & 15

Photo #8:

Date of Photo- 9/5/96
Description of view- Looking northwest at buildings 7 & 10

Photo #9:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98
Description of view- Looking east/southeast along 83rd Street to Buildings 33, 34, & 35

Photo #10:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98
Description of view- Looking south along Tracy Ave., Building 10

Photo #11:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98
Description of view- Looking east at buildings 5 & 18

Photo #12:

Date of Photo- 9/5/96
Description of view- Looking southwest at building 12

Photo #13:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98
Description of view- Looking east across open space towards buildings 16 & 18

Photo #14:

Date of Photo- 8/16/98
Description of view- Looking northeast at building 14

Photo #15:

Date of Photo- 9/5/96
Description of view- Looking northeast at building 21

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Photo # 16:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98

Description of view- Looking west across swimming pool
(non-contributing) towards buildings 13 & 15

Photo # 17:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98

Description of view- Looking northeast along Virginia
Ave., towards buildings 26 & 28

Photo #18:

Date of Photo- 5/16/98

Description of view- Looking north between buildings 26,
18, 20, 21, & 24

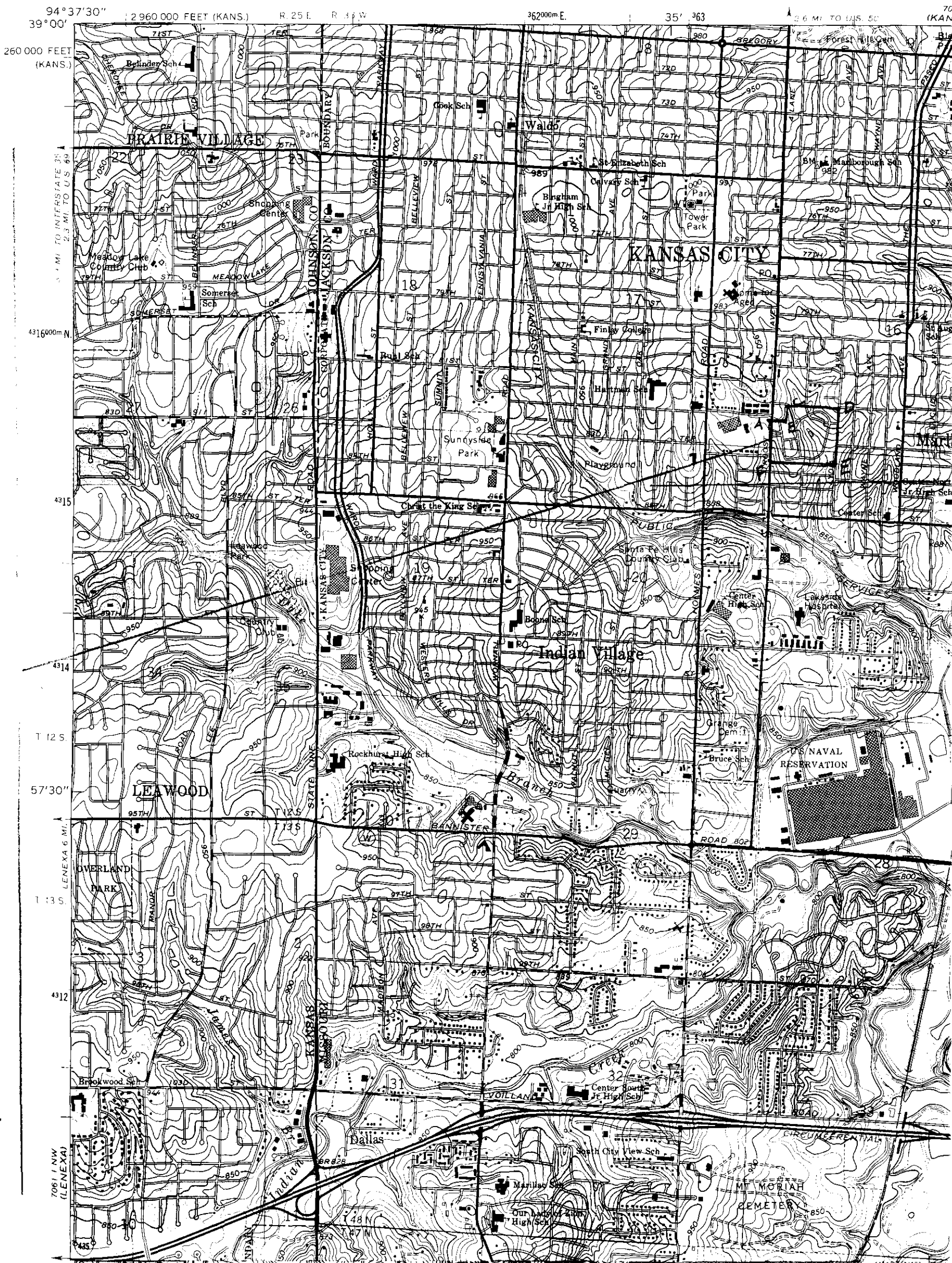
Photo # 19:

Date of Photo- 5/7/98

Description of view- Looking north/northwest at stone
wall in front of Building 23

7062 11 SW
(SHAWNEE)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



PRESIDENT GARDENS APARTMENTS HISTORIC DISTRICT, JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

A. 15/363480/4315380

B. 15/363570/4315315

C. 15/363580/4315460

D. 15/363400/4315450

E. 15/363545/4315100

F. 15/363465/4315130

Building 24; President Gardens Apartments Historic District

Kansas City, Missouri

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